

## SAUDI ARABIA

DiPs at The Blue Mugge pub Mon 14<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Based on the notes below which were used for a Lazy Trout discussion last February.

It will help if we have a few maps of Saudi Arabia – printed or on i-pads...

1. Our first question will be: what developments have there been since February which we should add to information and points below for discussion this evening?

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Lazy Trout 22 Feb 2016

The area of modern-day Saudi Arabia formerly consisted of four distinct regions: Hejaz, Najd, and parts of Eastern Arabia (Al-Ahsa) and Southern Arabia ('Asir). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by Ibn Saud. He united the four regions into a single state through a series of conquests beginning in 1902 with the capture of Riyadh, the ancestral home of his family, the House of Saud. The country has since been an absolute monarchy, effectively a hereditary dictatorship governed along Islamic lines.

The ultra-conservative Wahhabism religious movement within Sunni Islam has been called "the predominant feature of Saudi culture", with its global spreading largely financed by the oil and gas trade. Saudi Arabia is sometimes called "the Land of the Two Holy Mosques" in reference to Al-Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca), and Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (in Medina), the two holiest places in Islam.

In pre-Islamic times, apart from a small number of urban trading settlements (such as Mecca and Medina), most of what was to become Saudi Arabia was populated by nomadic tribal societies in the inhospitable desert. The Islamic prophet, Muhammad, was born in Mecca in about 571 A.D. In the early 7th century, Muhammad united the various tribes of the peninsula and created a single Islamic religious polity. Following his death in 632, his followers rapidly expanded the territory under Muslim rule beyond Arabia, conquering huge swathes of territory (from the Iberian Peninsula in west to modern day Pakistan in east) in a matter of decades. In so doing, Arabia soon became a politically peripheral region of the Muslim world as the focus shifted to the more developed conquered lands. From the 10th century to the early 20th century Mecca and Medina were under the control of a local Arab ruler known as the Sharif of Mecca, but at most times the Sharif owed allegiance to the ruler of one of the major Islamic empires based in Baghdad, Cairo or Istanbul. Most of the remainder of what became Saudi Arabia reverted to traditional tribal rule.

In the 16th century, the Ottomans added the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coast (the Hejaz, Asir and Al-Ahsa) to the Empire and claimed suzerainty over the interior. One reason was to thwart Portuguese attempts to attack the Red Sea (hence the Hejaz) and the Indian Ocean. Ottoman degree of control over these lands varied over the next four centuries with the fluctuating strength or weakness of the Empire's central authority. The emergence of what was to become the Saudi royal family, known as the Al Saud, began in Nejd in central Arabia in 1744, when Muhammad bin Saud, founder of the dynasty, joined forces with the religious leader Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabi movement, a strict puritanical form of Sunni Islam. This alliance formed in the 18th century provided the ideological impetus to Saudi expansion and remains the basis of Saudi Arabian dynastic rule today. The first "Saudi state" established in 1744 in the area around Riyadh, rapidly expanded and briefly controlled most of the present-day territory of Saudi Arabia, but was destroyed by 1818 by the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali Pasha. A much smaller second "Saudi state", located mainly in Nejd, was established in 1824. Throughout the rest of the 19th century, the Al Saud contested control of the interior of what was to become Saudi Arabia with another Arabian ruling family, the Al Rashid. By 1891, the Al Rashid were victorious and the Al Saud were driven into exile in Kuwait.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire continued to control or have a suzerainty over most of the peninsula. Subject to this suzerainty, Arabia was ruled by a patchwork of tribal rulers, with the Sharif of Mecca having pre-eminence and ruling the Hejaz. In 1902, Abdul Rahman's son, Abdul Aziz—later to be known as Ibn Saud—recaptured control of Riyadh bringing the Al Saud back to Nejd. Ibn Saud gained the support of the Ikhwan, a tribal army inspired by Wahhabism and led by Faisal Al-Dawish, and which had grown quickly after its foundation in 1912. With the aid of the Ikhwan, Ibn Saud captured Al-Ahsa from the Ottomans in 1913.

In 1916, with the encouragement and support of Britain (which was fighting the Ottomans in World War I), the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, led a pan-Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire to create a united Arab state. Although the Arab Revolt of 1916 to 1918 failed in its objective, the Allied victory in World War I resulted in the end of Ottoman suzerainty and control in Arabia.

Ibn Saud avoided involvement in the Arab Revolt, and instead continued his struggle with the Al Rashid. Following the latter's final defeat, he took the title Sultan of Nejd in 1921. With the help of the Ikhwan, the Hejaz was conquered in 1924–25 and on 10 January 1926, Ibn Saud declared himself King of the Hejaz. A year later, he added the title of King of Nejd. For the next five years, he administered the two

parts of his dual kingdom as separate units.

After the conquest of the Hejaz, the Ikhwan leadership's objective switched to expansion of the Wahhabist realm into the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and began raiding those territories. This met with Ibn Saud's opposition, as he recognized the danger of a direct conflict with the British. At the same time, the Ikhwan became disenchanted with Ibn Saud's domestic policies which appeared to favor modernization and the increase in the number of non-Muslim foreigners in the country. As a result, they turned against Ibn Saud and, after a two-year struggle, were defeated in 1930 at the Battle of Sabilla, where their leaders were massacred. In 1932 the two kingdoms of the Hejaz and Nejd were united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi\\_Arabia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia)

Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi.

Sharia law is THE law not just the basis of law. What is Sharia Law?

Gay sex is punishable by death but there is a large gay community in Riyadh?

Saudi is the largest exporter of oil with second largest reserves.

Saudi defence budget is fourth largest in the World.

Britain faces severe criticism from the European parliament over its continued arms trade with Saudi Arabia amid growing evidence of the Arab state's indiscriminate bombing of Yemen.

(Feb 2016)